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County To Test More Wells

By DAVE NICHOLSON dnicholson@tampatrib.com BY: and MEREDITH MENDEZ

Published: Aug 23, 2003

PLANT CITY - Patsy Hall can see the Coronet Industries plant from her kitchen window, and when she learned a neighbor's well three doors down had excessive amounts of arsenic, it heightened her fears.

She says her well water always looked a little funny. And the grandmother has always worried about the water flowing from her tap.

When she heard the results of a test of her neighbor's well, "That put [up] a red flag, and I immediately wanted our water checked to make sure we were drinking safe water," said Hall, who lives on Medulla Road.

Hall will soon get answers. So will others who live within a quarter-mile of the phosphate processing plant and whose wells were not included in an initial round of testing by health officials.

Hillsborough County Health Department Director Doug Holt announced plans Friday to test as many of the remaining wells as possible - all of them if the homeowners allow - within the quarter-mile radius. He estimates 45 to 50 wells were not sampled.

"We need to go back and get more of those houses," Holt said.

The testing starts in about a week.

Officials are particularly interested in the area of the contaminated wells, Holt said. Seven of the wells with bad water were found along Cason and Gentry roads, east of the plant's main building, with one of those wells serving two homes. One contaminated well was found on Coronet Road and another on Medulla Road, both south of the plant. He estimates there are 90 wells within the quarter-mile of the plant.

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Of the 43 homes sampled recently, nine showed unsafe levels of boron and one was positive for high levels of arsenic. The state Department of Environmental Protection is paying for bottled water for those who depend on the contaminated wells until filters can be installed to remove contaminants.

Ethel Robbins, whose well at her Cason Road home tested positive for boron, was grateful Friday when a Culligan truck pulled up to deliver water.

"You know we won't have to go and buy bottled water all the time, like we were doing. I think it will be a big help," she said.

Health and environmental officials are studying the area around the animal feed supplement factory at 4082 Coronet Road at the prompting of residents who complain of abnormally high rates of cancer and other illnesses in their neighborhoods.

Officials have not confirmed the claims of high rates of illness. Even if the rates are high, it is not known whether Coronet, old area landfills or some other source is to blame, they said.

Coronet officials could not be reached Friday for comment.

Reporter Dave Nicholson can be reached at (813) 754-3765.

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